

R. R.

SNIE 36.7-57

SEP 13 1957

3 September 1957

~~SECRET~~

Nº 235

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 36.7-57

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SYRIAN SITUATION

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 3 September 1957. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

CO AGGREGATE DOCUMENT **
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY,
12-47 Hqs.

~~SECRET~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DISSEMINATION NOTICE

1. This estimate was disseminated by the Central Intelligence Agency. This copy is for the information and use of the recipient indicated on the front cover and of persons under his jurisdiction on a need to know basis. Additional essential dissemination may be authorized by the following officials within their respective departments:

- a. Special Assistant to the Secretary for Intelligence, for the Department of State
- b. Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, for the Department of the Army
- c. Director of Naval Intelligence, for the Department of the Navy
- d. Director of Intelligence, USAF, for the Department of the Air Force
- e. Deputy Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, for the Joint Staff
- f. Director of Intelligence, AEC, for the Atomic Energy Commission
- g. Assistant Director, FBI, for the Federal Bureau of Investigation
- h. Assistant Director for Central Reference, CIA, for any other Department or Agency

2. This copy may be retained, or destroyed by burning in accordance with applicable security regulations, or returned to the Central Intelligence Agency by arrangement with the Office of Central Reference, CIA.

3. When an estimate is disseminated overseas, the overseas recipients may retain it for a period not in excess of one year. At the end of this period, the estimate should either be destroyed, returned to the forwarding agency, or permission should be requested of the forwarding agency to retain it in accordance with IAC-D-69/2, 22 June 1953.

4. The title of this estimate, when used separately from the text, should be classified:

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

WARNING

This material contains information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, Title 18, USC, Secs. 793 and 794, the transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

DISTRIBUTION:

White House
National Security Council
Department of State
Department of Defense
Operations Coordinating Board
Atomic Energy Commission
Federal Bureau of Investigation

SECRET

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SYRIAN SITUATION

THE PROBLEM

To assess the current situation in Syria, especially the degree of involvement with the Soviet Bloc, and prospects for a change in present trends.¹

INTRODUCTION

1. Syria has for about two years been dominated by a group of extreme Arab nationalists—army officers and civilian politicians—whose chief common motivation has been hatred of Western “imperialism” and of Israel and whose objectives lent themselves to exploitation and intensification by the Soviet Union. The composition of this group has varied with shifting Syrian loyalties and its membership is not entirely known. The group has elected to follow the example of Nasser in dealing with the Soviet Bloc,² but has shown less caution than Nasser in doing so.

2. During the past month this group consolidated its position and openly confirmed its policies by having the Syrian government:

a. Send to Moscow a mission which agreed in general terms on additional aid for Syria in an atmosphere of extravagant statements on Syrian-Soviet friendship, following up this mission by a delegation presently in Moscow to work out details;

b. Carry out a purge of moderate and rightist officers in key army posts; and

c. Publicize an alleged American plot against the government and members of the

group, declare three members of the US Embassy in Damascus *persona non grata*, and mount an intensive propaganda campaign against the US and Western “imperialism” in general.

3. The reasons for these events taking place in conjunction and at this particular time are not wholly clear. The dominant group was obviously concerned at the increased US influence in the area which seemed to be resulting from Hussein's dismissal of a leftist government in Jordan, the success of King Saud's visit to the US, and the rapprochement between the two monarchs. Accelerated development of the Syrian-Soviet relationship would have been an almost instinctive reaction, and the mission to Moscow may have been hastened by Syrian difficulties in meeting payments on previous credits. The Syrian leaders may have thought that an American-inspired coup was in fact imminent and that it could be forestalled by exposure. And whether or not they believed in the alleged plot, they may have felt that their story would provide justification for their new agreement with the Soviets. Khalid al Azm, the Acting Minister of Defense, may have gone farther in his protestations of solidarity with the USSR than had been anticipated before he left Damascus. It has been reported that Nizam al Din, the Syrian Chief of Staff who accompanied al Azm to Moscow, expressed disapproval of the latter's action while in the USSR. The purge which followed removed Nizam al Din and other potential sources of opposition within the armed forces.

¹ The estimate is concerned primarily with events within Syria, not with external reactions.

² Attached are: Annex A, Syrian Agreements with the Sino-Soviet Bloc; Annex B: Soviet Bloc Equipment Now Held by Syria.

SECRET

SECRET

2

4. While all the recent actions of the Syrian government were in accord with objectives long held by the dominant group, the evidence indicates that the timing and arrangement of the government's actions were influenced by the course of events and by unanticipated developments. While the Soviets were undoubtedly alert to opportunities to exploit the softening situation in Syria in accord with their general and area strategy,³ there is no clear evidence that these actions were taken in accordance with a prearranged over-all plan or that they were carried out on Soviet orders.

CURRENT SITUATION IN SYRIA

5. The members of Syria's current ruling group differ widely in background, outlook, and objectives. Colonel Sarraj, G-2 of the Syrian Army and hitherto the most widely known of the group, is an admirer and imitator of Nasser's policy. He has worked closely with the Arab nationalist, socialist, and Communist-infiltrated ASRP,⁴ of which a number of army officers on the fringes of the ruling group are members. General Bizri, the newly appointed Chief of Staff of the army, is reputed to have long been a Communist sympathizer and has shown himself to be pro-Soviet. General Nafuri, the new Deputy Chief of Staff, is an opportunist with a record of shifting from one side to the other. Among the civilians in the dominant group is Khalid al Azm who is an opportunist without principles. Akram Haurani, Michel Aflaq, and Salah al Din Bitar of the ASRP are Arab nationalists who believe in uniting all the Arab states into one nation and who are socialist but differ on the extent of cooperation with Syrian Communists.

6. Khalid Baqdash, the Moscow-trained leader of the Syrian Communist party and an influential member of Parliament, is close to members of the ruling group. This is primarily because he shares the group's views on Syria's

³The Soviets may have felt it particularly desirable, in view of the impending debate on Hungary in the UN, to make of the Syrian situation an issue which could be used against the US and the West.

⁴Arab Socialist Resurrectionist Party.

regional interests and objectives, and because he represents the indigenous group most friendly to the USSR. It appears improbable that Baqdash, despite his undoubted influence, is in a position to wield as much authority as members of the group.

7. The most important element within the dominant group and probably its original nucleus consists of half a dozen army officers organized in July 1955 and sometimes referred to as the "little RCC." Sarraj may still hold the balance of power within the "little RCC" and probably exercises influence over other members, despite the emergence of Bizri who is a later adherent. Sarraj, however, prefers to work behind the scenes.

8. Although conclusive evidence is lacking, it appears that the dominant group in Syria is neither the tool of a single strong man nor a committee but that it is a loose coalition which functions by means of the combined influence and resources of its members. The principal internal resources of the ruling group are: (a) street mobs, which it is able to organize and control; (b) the army, which appreciates having new Soviet weapons and which is now commanded by members and supporters of the group; (c) the ASRP, which is a relatively compact and well-organized political party with its own important faction in the army; (d) the Communist party, which is also well-led and well-disciplined; and (e) the military intelligence organization, which under Colonel Sarraj is a formidable political and police weapon. Behind all this is the support of the Soviet Union.

9. The President, the Prime Minister, and most of the members of the cabinet and Parliament go through the motions of governing without actually doing anything contrary to the wishes of the dominant group. At least so far, the routine work of the government is carried on from day to day by the career bureaucrats.

10. The chronic political instability of Syria over the past several years has left the general public apathetic to developments, although there is some popular support for the coalition's policies. So long as it retains control of the army and other security forces the

SECRET

SECRET

3

coalition can dispose of any likely effort from within Syria to establish a new regime. There are a number of opposition groups — the conservative Nationalist and Populist parties, the Syrian Social National Party, the tribes of the East and South, and many merchants of Aleppo. However, over the past two years the coalition has taken action against them, and they are at present largely disorganized and lack effective support as well as determination and leadership.

INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SOVIET BLOC

11. We believe the dominant coalition in Syria entered its present relationship with the Soviet Bloc: (a) to obtain arms with which to build up the Syrian armed forces; (b) to build up the Syrian economy; (c) as an act of defiance and of retaliation for the West's part in the creation of Israel and Israel's humiliation of Syria and the other Arab states. It appears that the Syrians have often taken the initiative in developing their present relationship with the Soviet Bloc. We have no evidence that, except in the case of Baqdash, and perhaps Bizri, the actions of the Syrian coalition have been influenced by Communist ideology.

12. The Bloc has exploited this situation by selling Syria all the arms it wants, by arranging economic assistance programs to be paid for on easy credit terms, by making trade agreements, by sending military and civilian technicians and advisers to Syria and accepting Syrian trainees in the Soviet Bloc,⁵ and by giving Syria vague assurances of Soviet protection against "imperialist" aggression. The Bloc has also continued an intensive propaganda campaign within Syria and has given propaganda and diplomatic support to the Syrian position and Syrian policy outside the country.

13. The Syrian relationship with the Bloc appears to differ in important respects from that envisioned in Nasser's doctrine of "positive neutralism." Syria has already accepted

⁵ At present there are 150-200 Bloc military and about 175 civilian technicians and advisers in Syria and about 100 Syrian trainees in the Bloc.

a degree of dependence upon the Soviet Bloc and of alienation from the West which gives the Bloc significant political and economic warfare capabilities. Furthermore, the Syrian leaders have gone so far in their hostility toward the West and uncritical trust of the Bloc that they are almost as susceptible to Soviet influence as they would be if Syria were actually a member of the Bloc. Indeed, they probably are more useful to the Bloc as nationalists than as Communists. The Syrian leaders profess to be much concerned about maintaining Syrian independence and sovereignty, but it appears likely that their suspicion of the West and their neighbors, their hatred of Israel, their desire to remain in power, and their own unrealistic appraisal of their ability to withstand Soviet penetration will make them reckless of precautions in this regard.

PROSPECTS

14. In the absence of forceful intervention from outside Syria, the presently dominant coalition, or a variant thereof, probably will be able to maintain control for some time. No opposition group within the country, civilian or military, is likely to challenge the coalition effectively. Some groups within the country may hope for intervention from the outside. However, if the Israeli hand were apparent in any such move, Syrians would be united in bitter opposition. Most Syrians would also oppose unilateral Turkish intervention and few would rally to a movement which appeared to be dominated and directed by Turkey. On the other hand, intervention by one or more Arab states would be favored by members of the opposition even though they would suspect that it had Turkish support and that some degree of overt Turkish participation would be likely at some point. The degree of Syrian support for such intervention would depend in some measure on the effectiveness with which Turkish initiative could be concealed and, more importantly, on indications of the likelihood of the success of the intervention.

15. In order to preserve the appearance of legitimacy, the coalition will probably retain a facade of parliamentary government as long

SECRET

SECRET

4

as possible. If the coalition should extend its purge into the working level of the bureaucracy, essential government functions might be impaired. In view of the country's current financial and marketing difficulties, the coalition will find it necessary to give greater attention to economic affairs, but because of its overriding preoccupation with political matters and its economic naivete it may be unsuccessful in these efforts. It seems probable that the Syrian economy will become increasingly oriented toward the Soviet Bloc, thus restricting Syria's freedom of economic action. Large scale Bloc credits, such as those envisaged by the Soviet-Syrian communique of 6 August 1957, are likely to accelerate this process. The coalition may use the threat of nationalization to squeeze all possible revenue out of the pipelines which cross the country, but will probably not interrupt the flow of petroleum unless it is confronted with what it considers a major provocation demanding immediate retaliation. Such a real or imagined provocation may come from Israel, from other hostile neighbors, or from the West.

16. The coalition's greatest weakness is probably the delicacy of its present equilibrium. While the civilian and military elements can agree on negative goals and motivations, such as hatred of Israel and the West, and opposition to union with Iraq or association with the Baghdad Pact, they lack common positive goals. Khalid al Azm's eagerness for the presidency is likely to set him at odds with the other members of the coalition. There are two factions in the ASRP group. The

more prominent members of the military group were engaged in a struggle for power among themselves a few months ago. The personal antagonism between Sarraj and Nafuri is reported to be as strong as ever. Thus it is unlikely that the present coalition will long remain unchanged. While there is insufficient information available to make possible a judgment on the probable evolution of the coalition, Sarraj, with his influence in the "little RCC," the mechanism of the military intelligence organization at his disposal, his ability to avoid over-reaching himself, and the possibility of some ASRP support, appears to have more prospects for survival than other members. It is not expected, however, that any changes in the composition of the dominant group will reduce the group's willingness to look to the USSR for support.

17. The Syrian-Soviet relation has enhanced the Soviet position as a great power concerned with the affairs of the Middle East. It has given the USSR greatly increased opportunities for harassing the West. At the same time, the USSR has shown some caution in accepting commitments in the Middle East. We therefore believe that the USSR will not wish to treat Syria as a new satellite but will find it expedient to deal with it as an Arab nationalist state and to render economic and political support, as well as military aid, to the presently dominant group. The Soviets are likely to find Syria useful to their interests as a sphere of influence, as an example of the benefits of Soviet friendship, and as a base for operations in the Middle East.

SECRET

Page Denied

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Denied

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~